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SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR WHA/CAR - LLUFTIG
DEPT FOR INL/LP NBOZZOLO, KBROWN
CARACAS FOR LEGATT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SNAR KCRM PGOV PREL ECON NS

SUBJECT: PROMINENT CASINO OWNER CONVICTED OF MONEY
LAUNDERING AND DRUG TRAFFICKING IN DUTCH COURT

REF: (A) 05 PARAMARIBO 198 (B) 05 PARAMARIBO 068

¶1. (U) Summary. On 23 December a judge in the Netherlands sentenced Bidjay Parmessar to ten years in prison for drug trafficking, money laundering and fraud. Parmessar, who is a Dutch national, is a well-known and influential businessman in Suriname. He was arrested in March 2005 as part of 'Operation Ficus,' a joint operation between Suriname and the Netherlands aimed to tackle drug trafficking and money laundering occurring between Suriname and the Netherlands. (See ref A). End Summary.

¶2. (U) Parmessar was the chief operator and owner of the Yokohama Trading Company, which Surinamese and Dutch judicial authorities had long suspected of being a front for a criminal organization. The Dutch judiciary found that the head of Yokohama was involved in trafficking large amounts of cocaine from Suriname to the Netherlands and other European countries and laundering the proceeds through his company's many casinos, car dealerships, foreign exchange offices, and money transfer offices in both countries. Operation Ficus, begun in 2000, has devoted millions of Euros to investigating the so-called Yokohama drugs cartel, culminating in the arrest of the Yokohama head last year by French officials in Paris after he had fled Suriname to avoid arrest in March 2005. He fled just after his business concerns in Suriname were raided and associates arrested in a joint Surinamese-Dutch operation to seize evidence. French authorities immediately extradited him to the Netherlands. Despite Parmessar's arrest and conviction, Yokohama business entities, such as its car dealerships and casinos, continue to operate.

¶3. (U) The presiding judge passed down a ten year sentence, even though the Dutch Attorney General's office only requested nine years. His sentence is based on evidence that he arranged drug transports behind the scenes; the Court made this ruling despite a lack of physical evidence of cocaine being trafficked or being in his possession, according to local press reports. The prosecution also reportedly provided evidence that Parmessar was laundering money through his company's money transfer offices in the Netherlands and Suriname using forged invoices.

¶4. (U) After the trial Parmessar's lawyer, Inez Weski, said she thought "the verdict was insane" because there was no clear-cut evidence against her client. (Note: Weski is also the lawyer of former military dictator and current Surinamese politician Desi Bouterse, who has hired her to overturn his conviction for narcotics trafficking rendered

in the Netherlands in absentia in 1999. End Note.) During the trial, Weski objected to the methods used by Dutch authorities during the investigation, such as infiltration and wiretapping. She also claimed that the Dutch did not obtain authorization for their investigations in Suriname. Her objections, however, were overruled by the Dutch Court, which stated that investigations in Suriname were properly led by examining judge Albert Ramnewash and the then Commissioner of the Judicial Police, Chandrikapersad Santokhi, who is now the Minister of Justice and Police.

¶15. (U) Operation Fiscus also led to the arrest of Parmessar's brother, Bisoen Parmessar, in January 2005. (See ref B). He was arrested in Suriname, but then later extradited to the Netherlands where he is expected to face trial early this year on drug trafficking and money laundering charges.

BARNES